

# **Cañon Ciruela Acquisition for Addition to Sabinoso Wilderness**

## **Proposed Action**

### **Introduction**

The Trust for Public Land (TPL) acquired approximately 9,855 acres, more or less, of land adjacent and contiguous to the Sabinoso Wilderness in San Miguel County, New Mexico. TPL closed on the Cañon Ciruela property (8,947 acres) on October 21, 2019 and the Trust Property totaling 908 acres on March 19, 2021. By letter dated March 19, 2021, the TPL offered to donate all of this land to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) under Section 6 of the Wilderness Act of 1964 to become a part of the Sabinoso Wilderness.

Supporting this effort, the Cañon Ciruela property was found compatible as an addition to the Wilderness by the BLM in a report dated July 31, 2019 and the Trust Property was found to be compatible in a separate report dated September 28, 2020. The purpose of the donation is to enhance the existing wilderness by including a large tributary watershed (Cañon Ciruela) of the primary watershed (Cañon Largo) in the wilderness, and expanding public visitation opportunities, including a new access point to the Sabinoso Wilderness.

### **Property Description**

Attached is a map and the legal descriptions of the proposed donation. The vast majority of the property is located on the northwest side of the Sabinoso Wilderness which includes the vast majority of Cañon Ciruela, the project's namesake, and portions of Cañon Largo and Spring Canyon. In addition to the primary focus of the donation are three other properties. A small parcel on the southeast side of the wilderness, an inholding near the center of the wilderness, and an access easement (donated under the authority of Section 205 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act)—please see attached map. The TPL believes the offered lands are integral components of the Sabinoso Wilderness environment, providing further diversity to the predominantly mesa top lands currently within the designation, and protecting an important tributary watershed. The property is wilderness quality with little human disruption or development.

### **Land and Access**

TPL acquired the Cañon Ciruela property in fee title, including a public access easement from County Road C53-A. This would provide new public access to the wilderness from the northwest side. The Trust property was also acquired in fee title and includes six separate parcels. There are no additional public access easements associated with these parcels.

### **Mineral Rights**

TPL acquired all the mineral rights owned by the seller and would convey those with the donation. However, the mineral estate is highly fractionated in this general area and the County title records do not clearly or completely reflect full current mineral ownership. In 1987, a mineral report was completed by the US Geological Survey for the then Sabinoso Wilderness Study Area. This report concluded no economically significant metallic minerals present, no oil and gas present (based on nearby drill holes that did not indicate geology suitable to, or the presence of hydrocarbons), and low to moderate potential for uranium. In 2019, a mineral assessment was contracted by TPL to address the Cañon Ciruela property

which concluded that the likelihood of the presence of commercially viable metallic or industrial minerals, oil, natural gas, CO<sub>2</sub>, coal, coal-bed methane, and geothermal resources was so remote as to be negligible. Both the aforementioned BLM Wilderness Compatibility Evaluations considered mineral resources and determined the possibility of any future mineral activity as very low.

### **Livestock Grazing**

The property would be donated to the BLM with a deed restriction on future grazing. The property had no associated BLM grazing permits.

### **Resource Values**

The property includes the majority of the Cañon Ciruela watershed, which is a significant tributary to Cañon Largo, located within the existing wilderness. The property is home to mule deer, mountain lion, black bear, and Rio Grande turkey. The archeological values have not been surveyed, but Cañon Largo is a longstanding route between what became Fort Union and Fort Bascom, and the remnants of a historic military road cross from Canon Largo to this property. The archeological values are likely to be quite high. The property contains high scenic values, most notable a portion of Punta Ciruela which, with its sandstone cliffs and fins, is a landmark of the area. The contiguous parcels would significantly add to, enhance and secure the resource conservation values of the existing designated wilderness. The majority of the property is also located within the Sabinoso Area of Critical Environmental Concern established through the Taos RMP. The transfer of these lands would create additional access to the Sabinoso Wilderness, enabling the public to benefit from the recreation and wilderness values of the Sabinoso Wilderness.

### **Proposal**

The BLM proposes to accept the donate the approximately 9,855 acres contingent upon:

1. Their addition to the Sabinoso Wilderness by the Secretary of Interior, after completion of notice to the President of the Senate, as required in Section 6(a) of the Wilderness Act.
2. Reaching an agreement satisfactory to TPL that permanently excludes grazing on the donated property [Section 6(a) provides for acceptance of donated adjacent lands for inclusion in the adjacent wilderness subject to “such conditions, consistent with such policy, as may be included in, and accepted with, such bequest.”] TPL would also donate any mineral rights owned by it, as well as any and all access rights it has to the property. TPL offers these lands to the BLM without any further reservation on the deed.